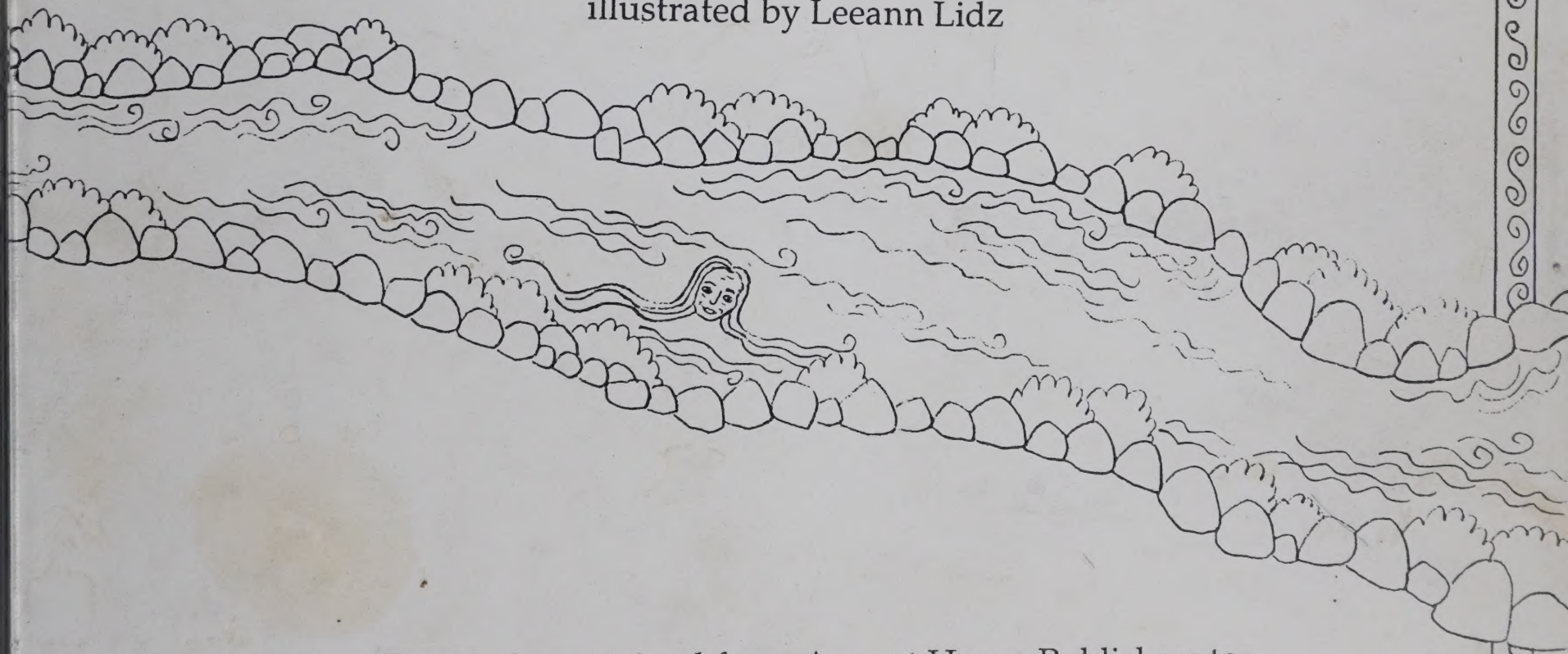
THE RIVER MAN

A Spanish-American Folktale

told by Teresa Pijoan de Van Etten*

illustrated by Leeann Lidz



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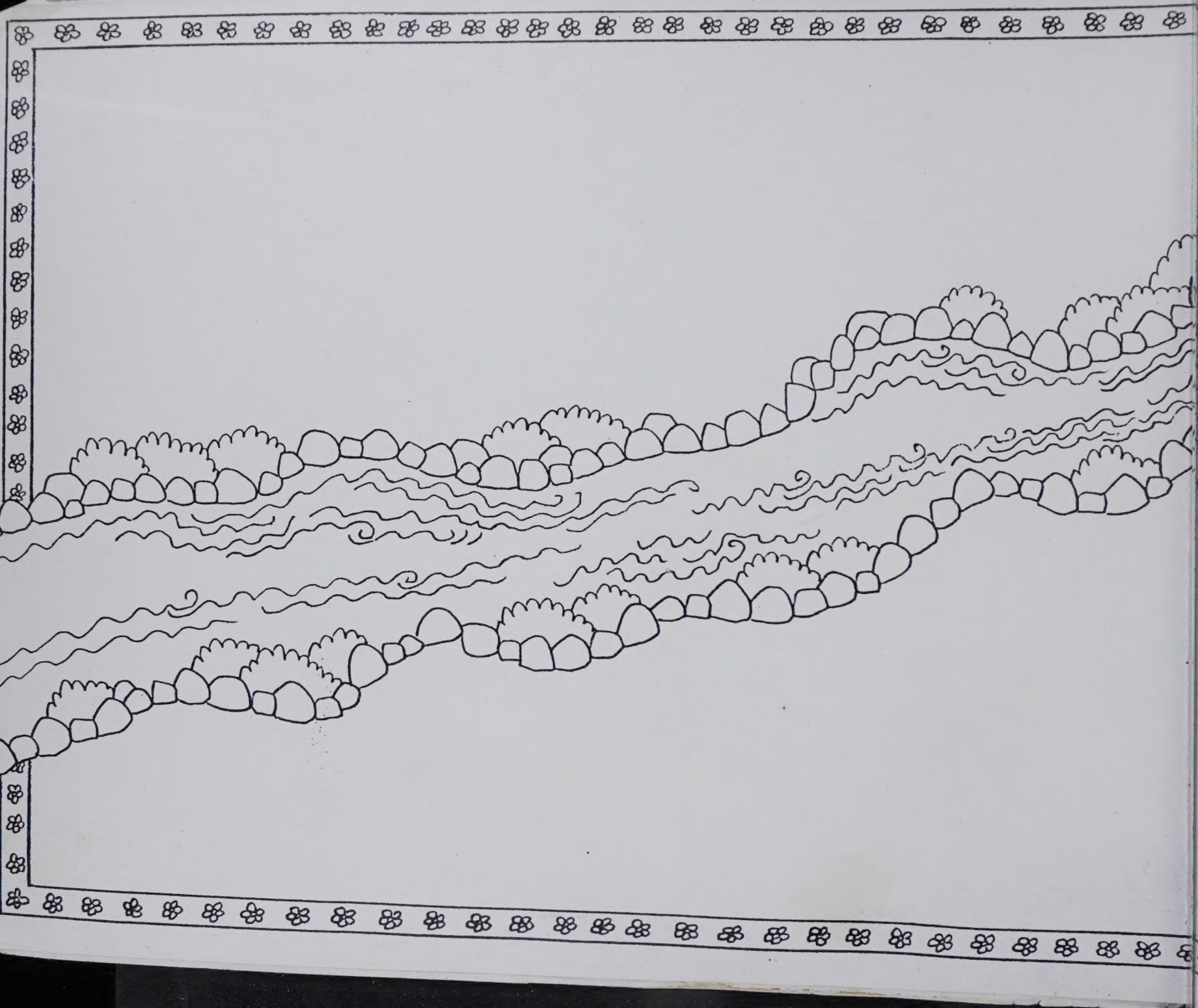
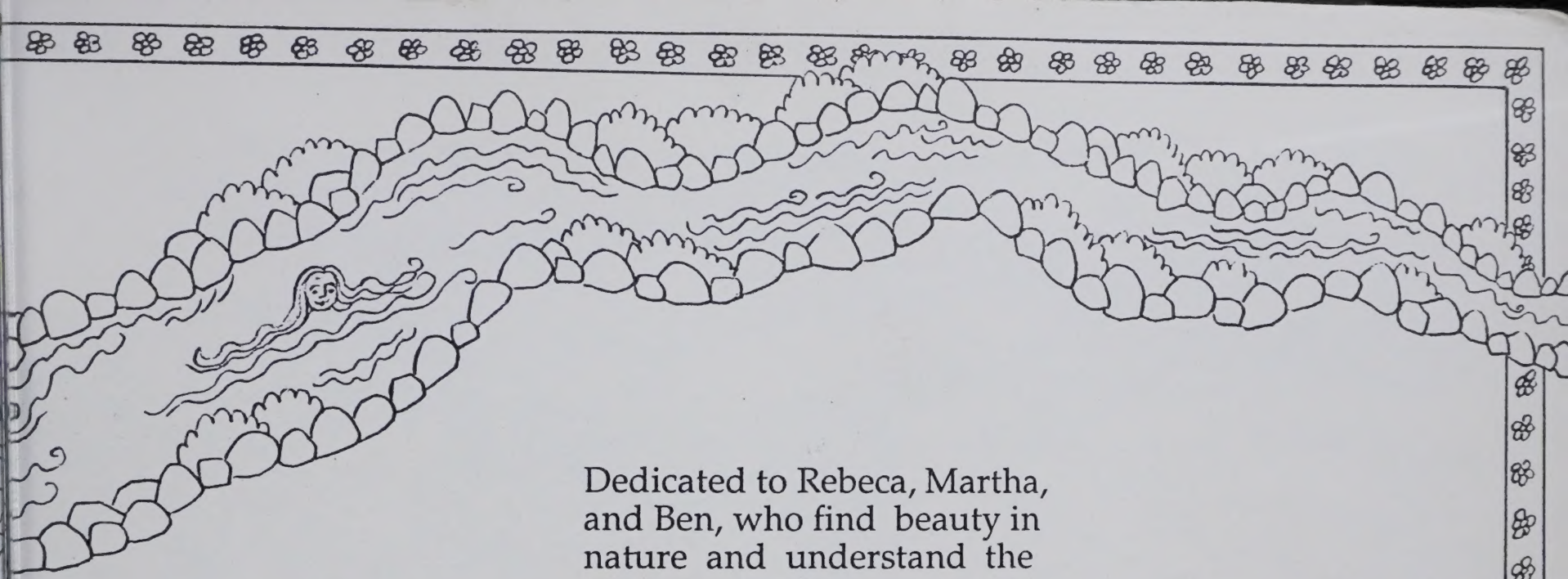
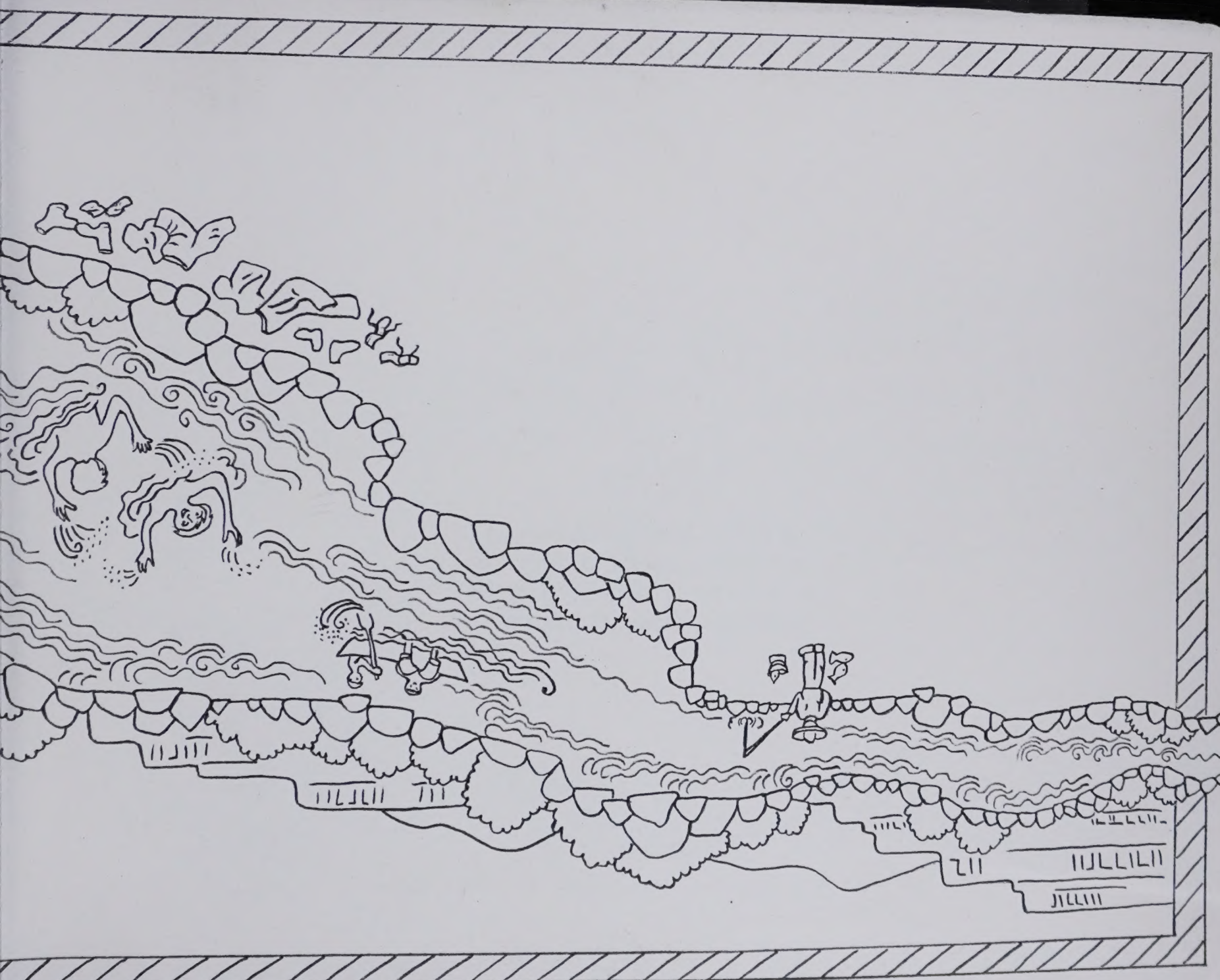
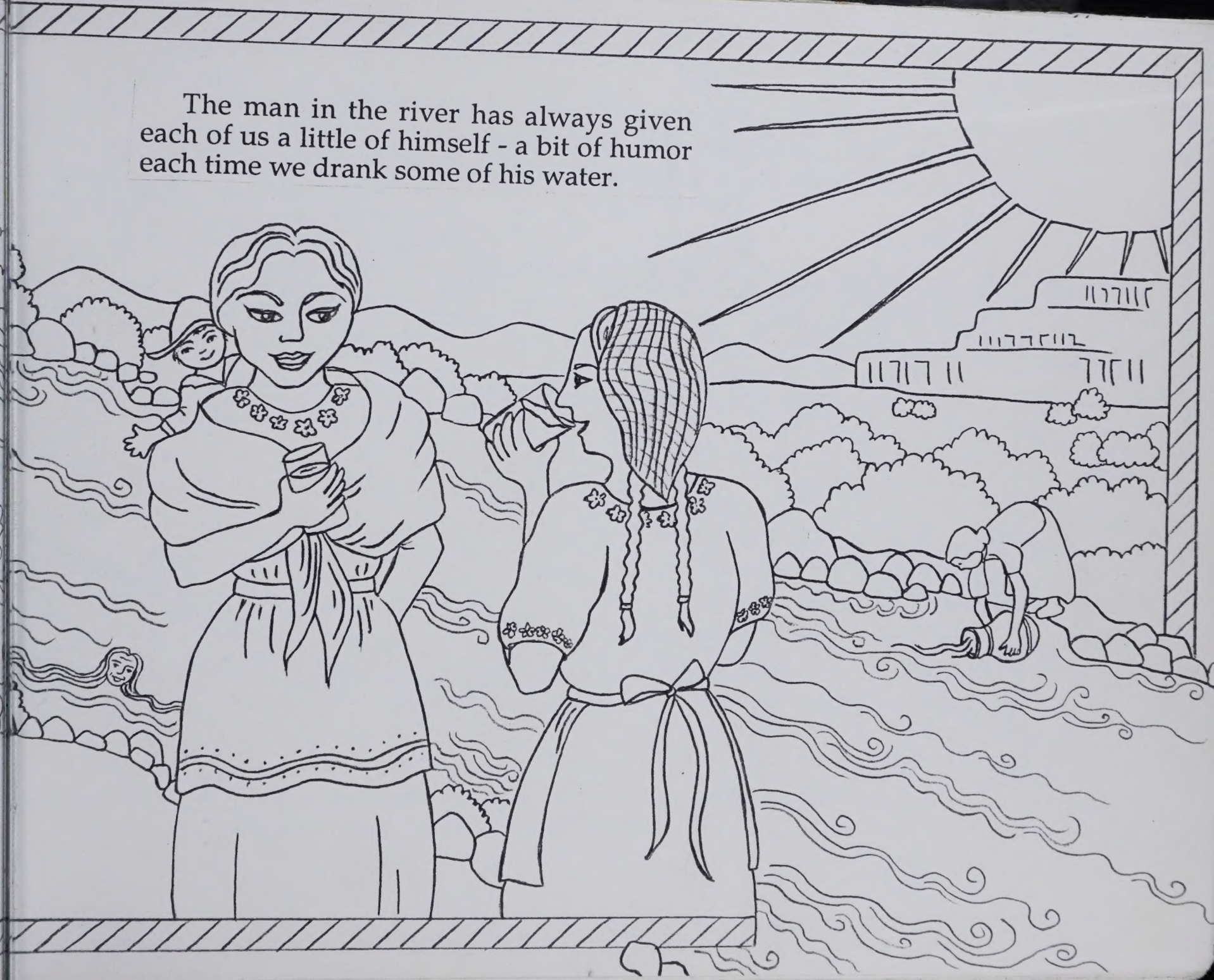




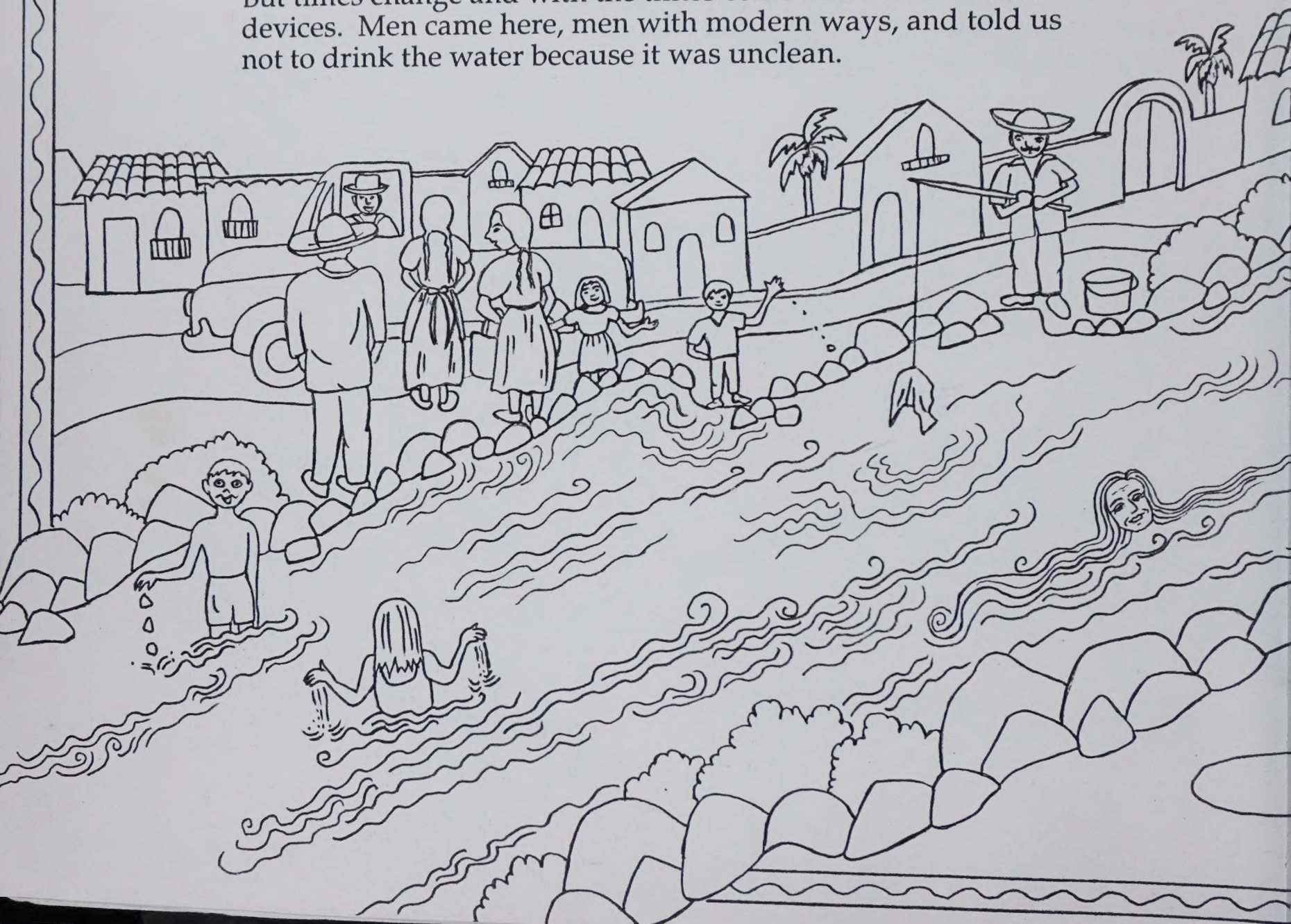
Dedicated to Rebeca, Martha, and Ben, who find beauty in nature and understand the importance of preserving it.

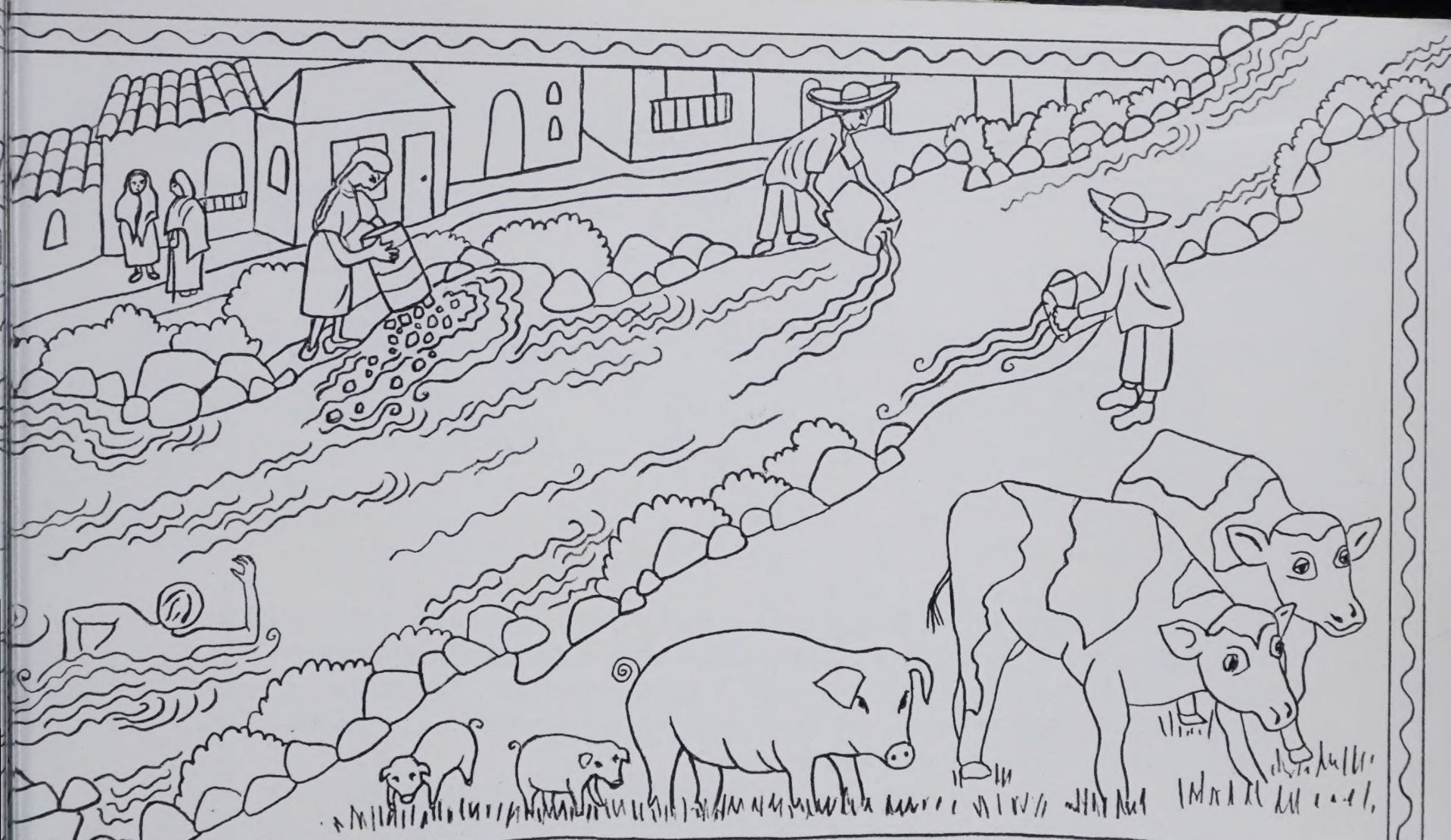


The man in the river has always given each of us a little of himself - a bit of humor each time we drank some of his water.

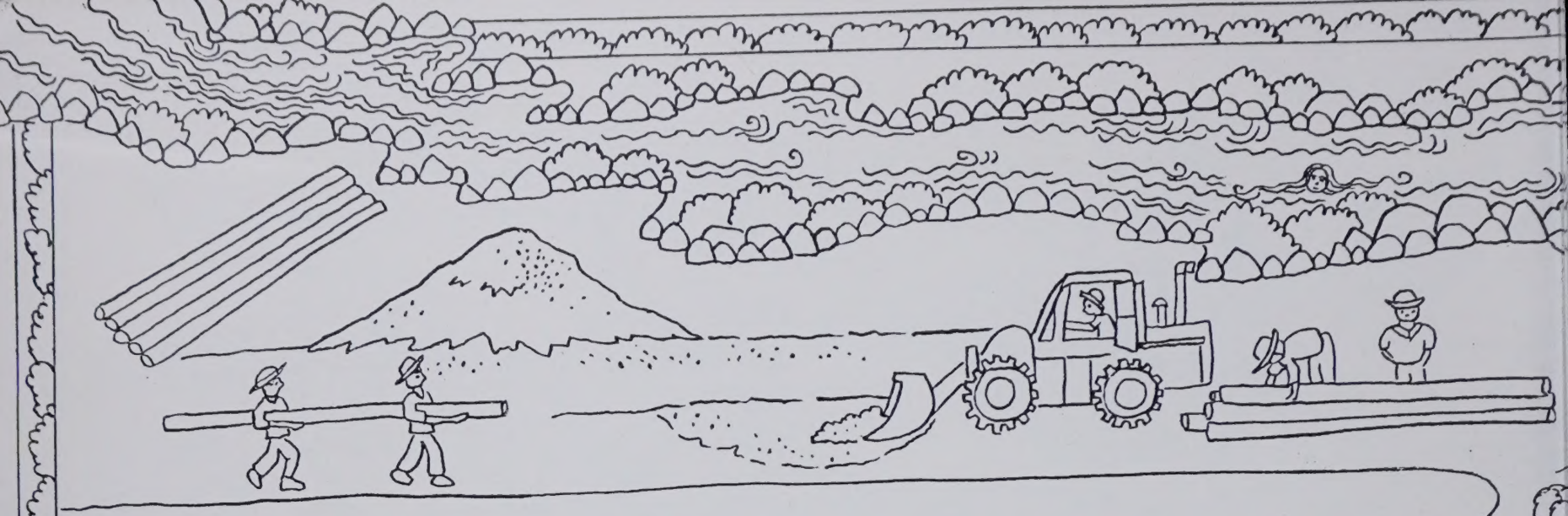


But times change and with the times come new ideas and new devices. Men came here, men with modern ways, and told us not to drink the water because it was unclean.



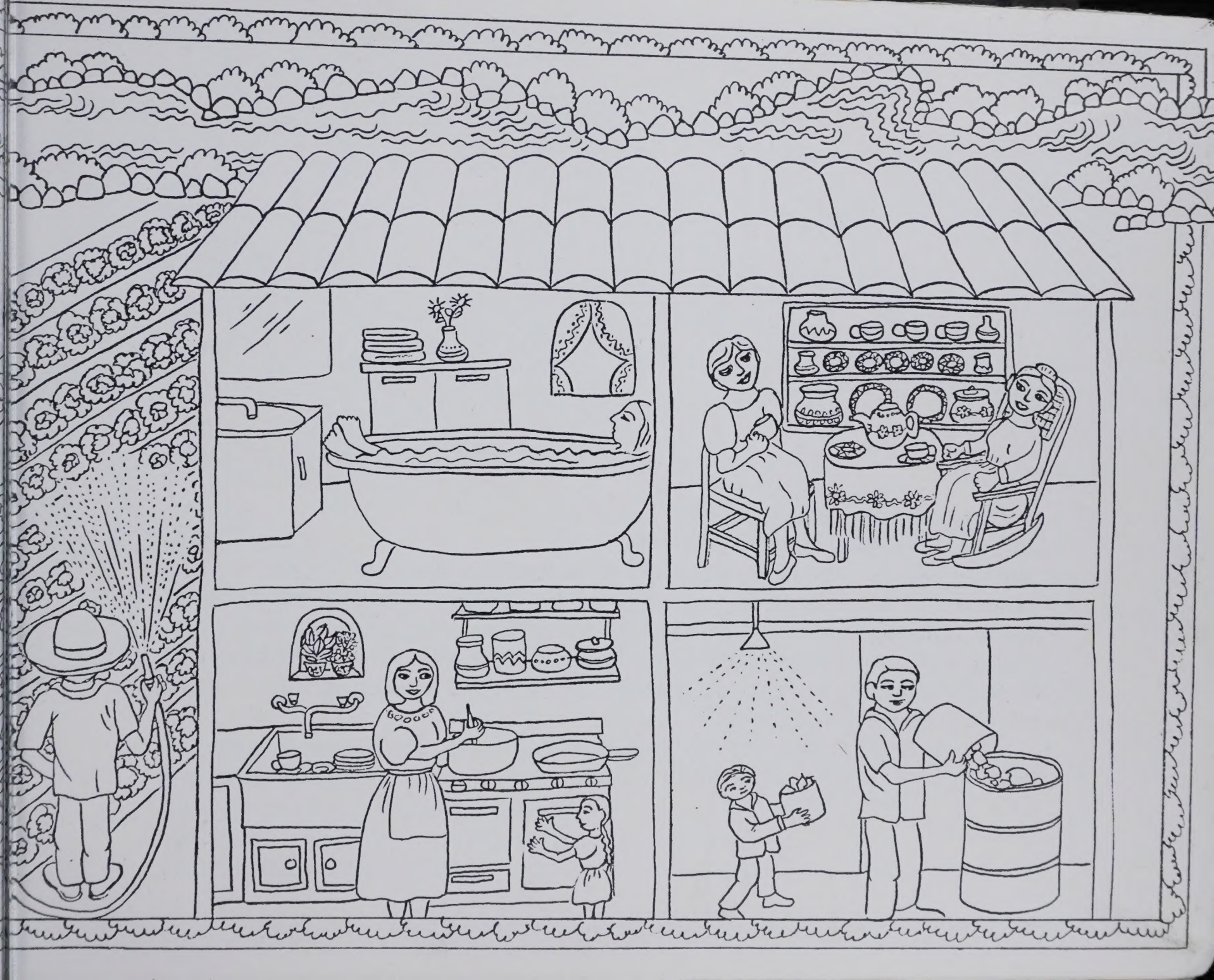


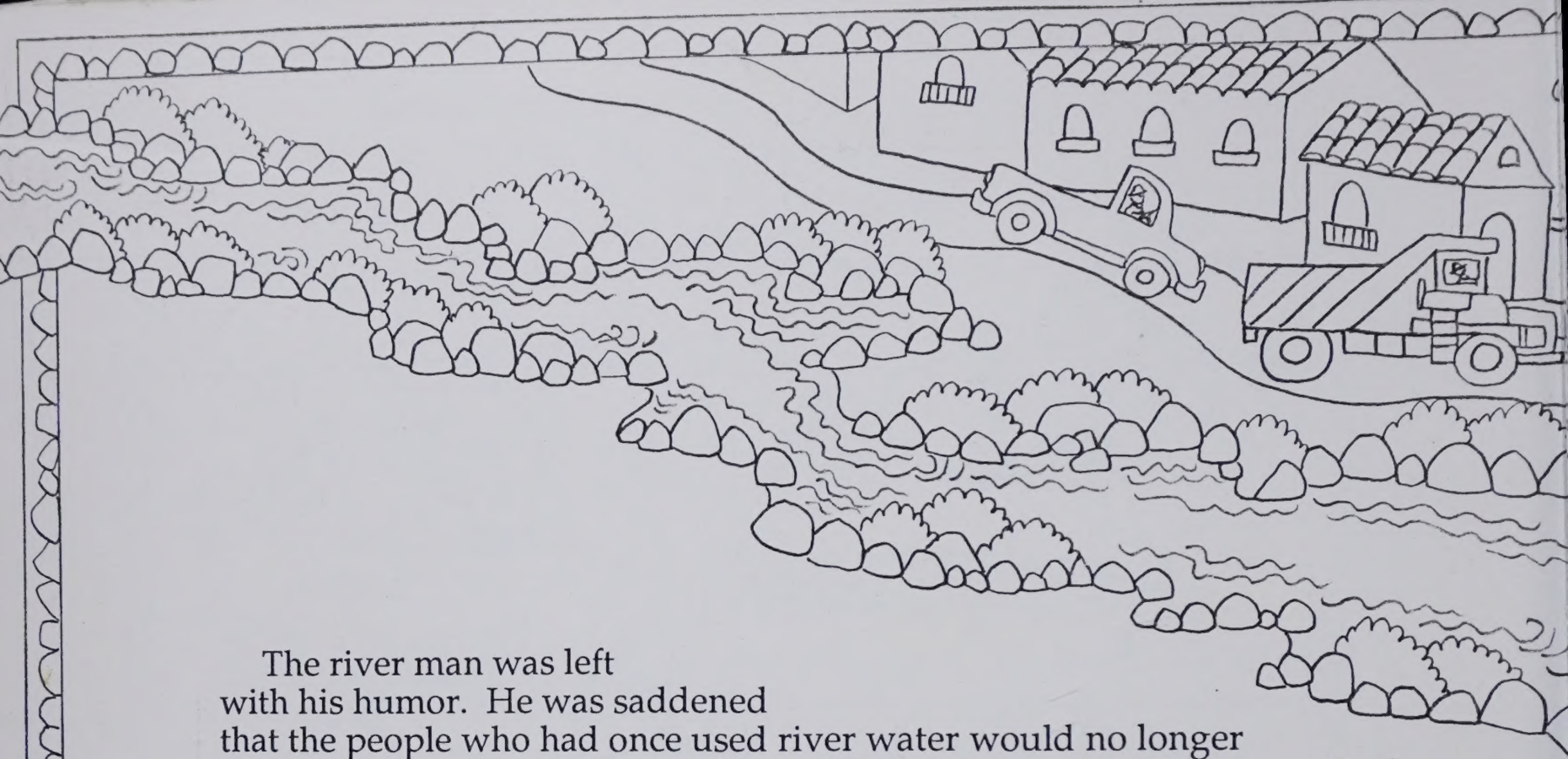
They were right - people had thrown garbage in the river and the water was unclean.



The men brought in clean, shiny metal pipes. The earth was dug up and channeled to hold these metal pipes that contained the water. The river and ditches no longer carried it to the people. River water was forgotten. People even forgot to throw their garbage in the river. The water slowly became clean again.

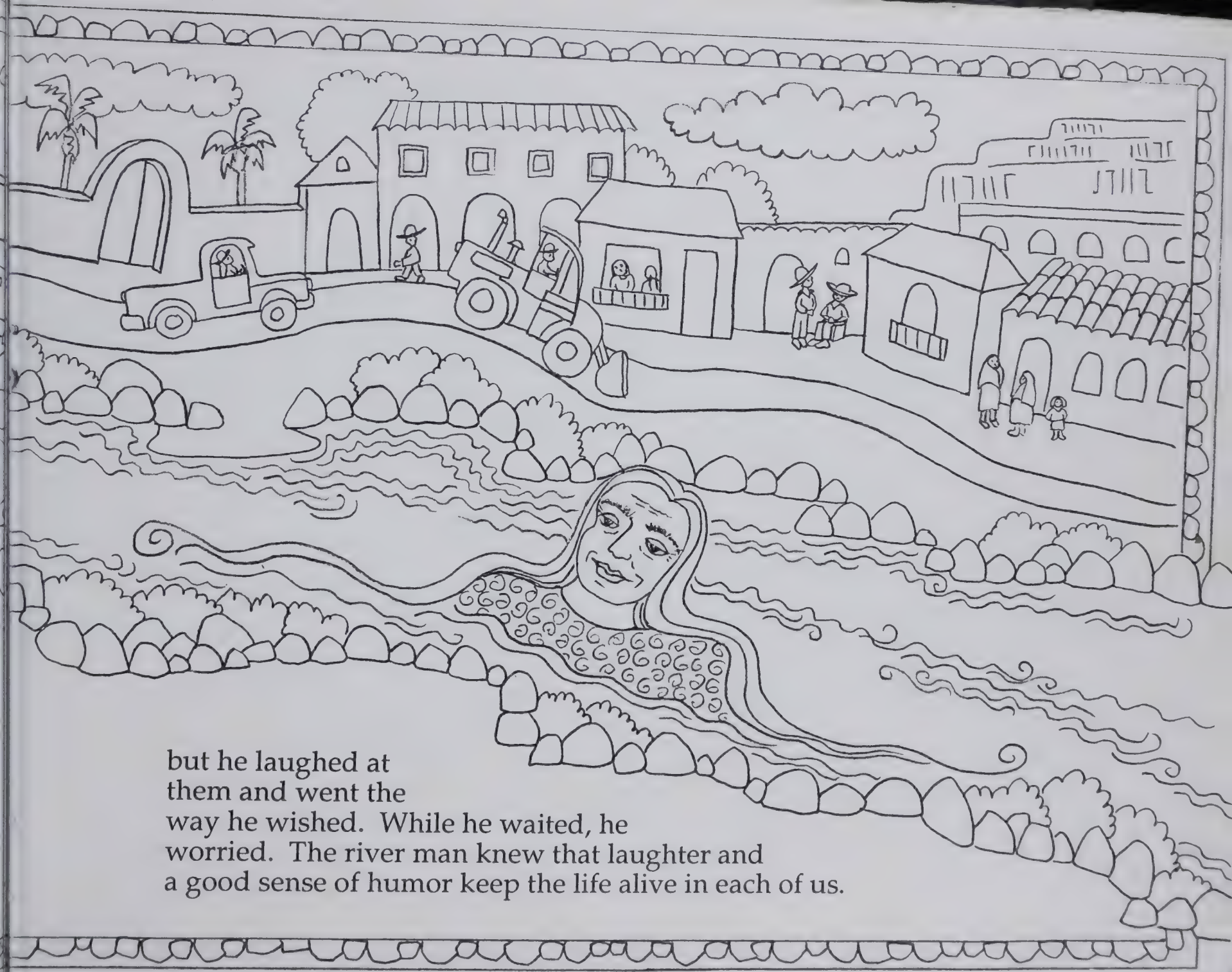
The river was no longer used for washing, bathing, drinking, or cooking. The great humor of the river man was untapped. We were too busy using modern appliances, piped water, and water in bottles to think of river water.





The river man was left with his humor. He was saddened that the people who had once used river water would no longer have that little smile in the morning after drinking a cup of tea or coffee made with it. He worried about the children bathing in such pure, piped water - where would their mischievous go? And the old ones - how would they keep their crooked smiles and sparkling eyes? How would they be now?

The river man waited. He waited a long time. He listened to the big tractors and trucks that came by. Some of them tried to change his path,



but he laughed at
them and went the
way he wished. While he waited, he
worried. The river man knew that laughter and
a good sense of humor keep the life alive in each of us.

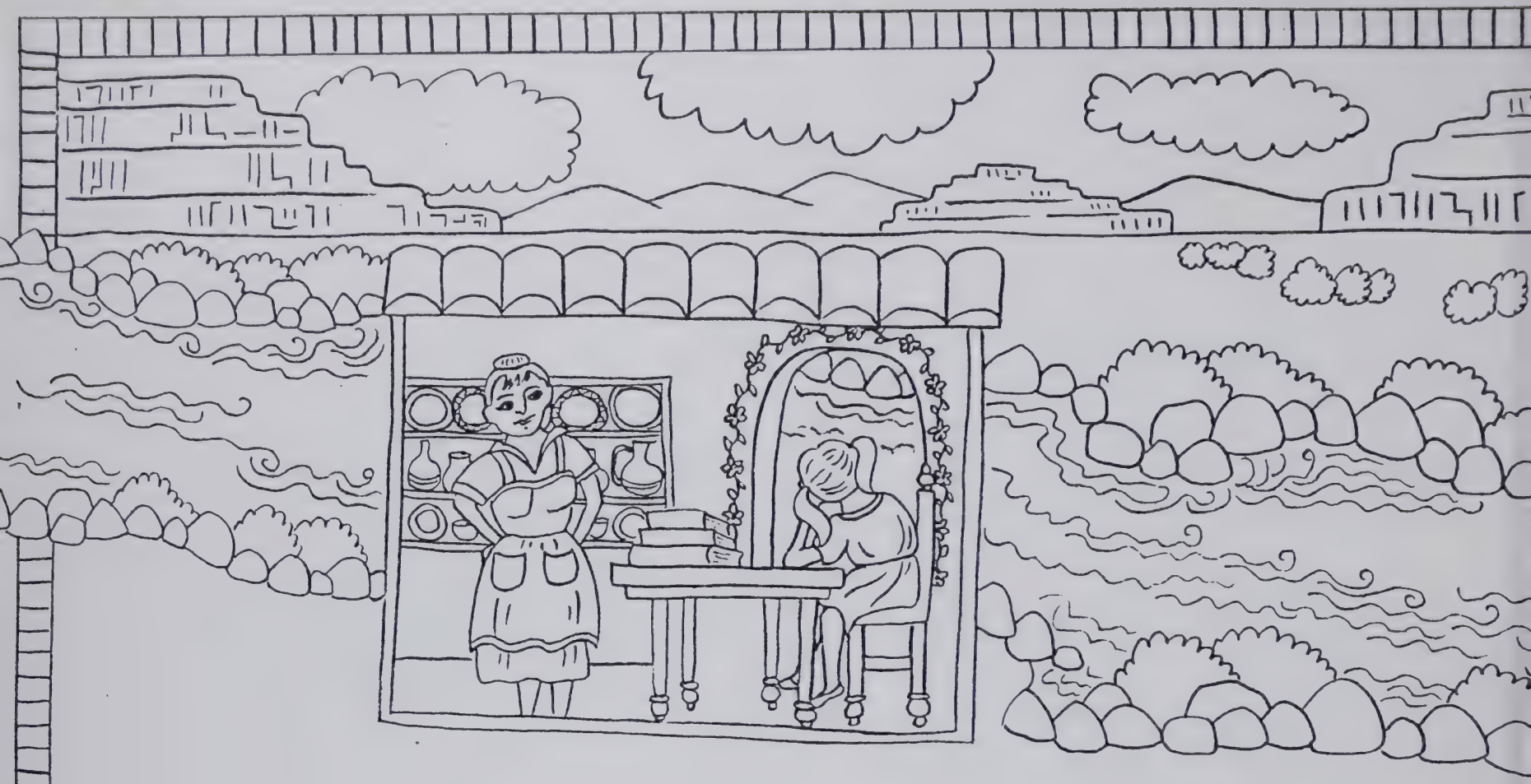
The river man watched from his flowing river. He heard babies cry - cry a lot. He heard small children complain and pout around their

mothers and each other. The river man saw the old ones dry up in sadness. The river man didn't wait to see the old ones die. Oh no. He made a plan.

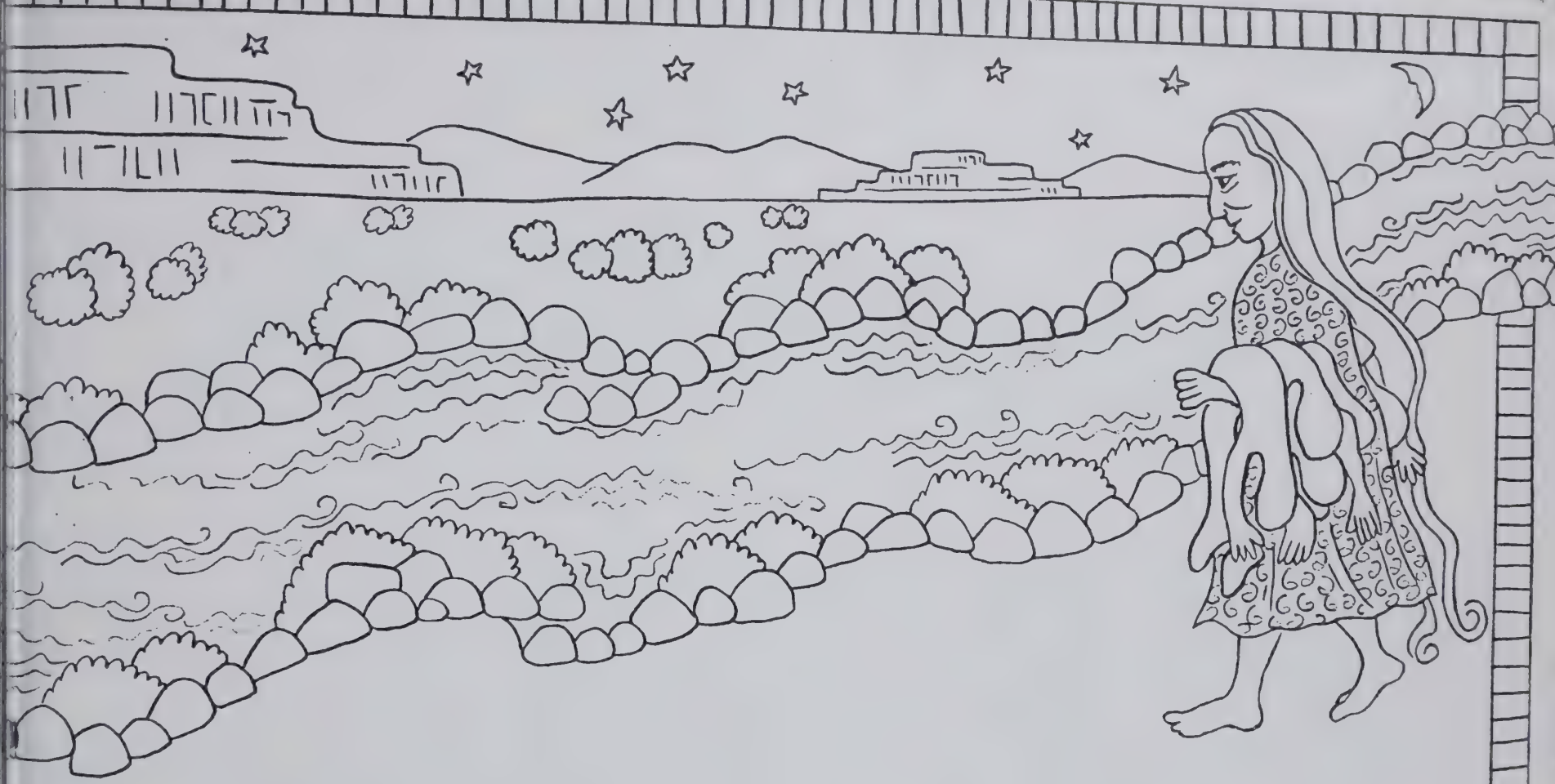
The river man crept out of the river at night and went into people's houses. He went to the fancy new machines and pulled some wires; he went into the children's rooms and moved their

toys around; he went to the old people's houses and took their false teeth.

The river man did mischief. He went to the house vaults of the rich ones, and he took their money and floated it in the river. The people became angry and irritable. We argued and fought.



One mother took her daughter out of school. She tried to teach her at home, but the little girl sat at the window and stared at the flowing river. The mother let her look, for she did not know that to do with the child.



One night, the river man came out of the river and took everyone's shadow. The children no longer had their shadows to play with. The lonely ones could no longer talk to their shadows. The old ones would no longer watch their shadows walk with them.

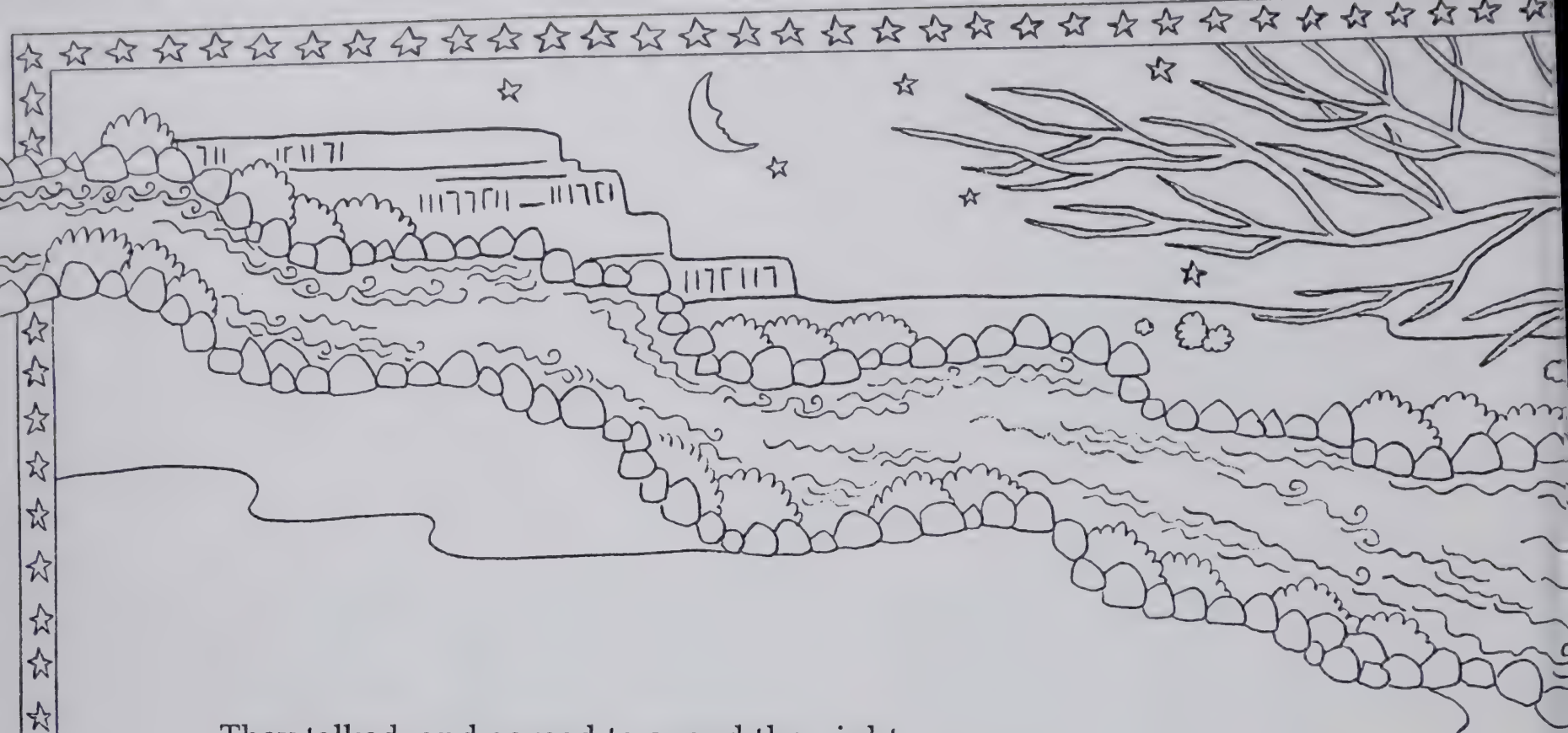
The little girl who lived with her mother stopped smiling, for her best friend was her shadow. She called for her shadow; she searched in the trees and the woods for her shadow. She didn't find it.

One afternoon she met a young man who was looking for his money. He was very rich, and he had seen his money mysteriously hurrying out

the door toward the river early in the morning.

"Did you take my money?" the youth asked the little girl.

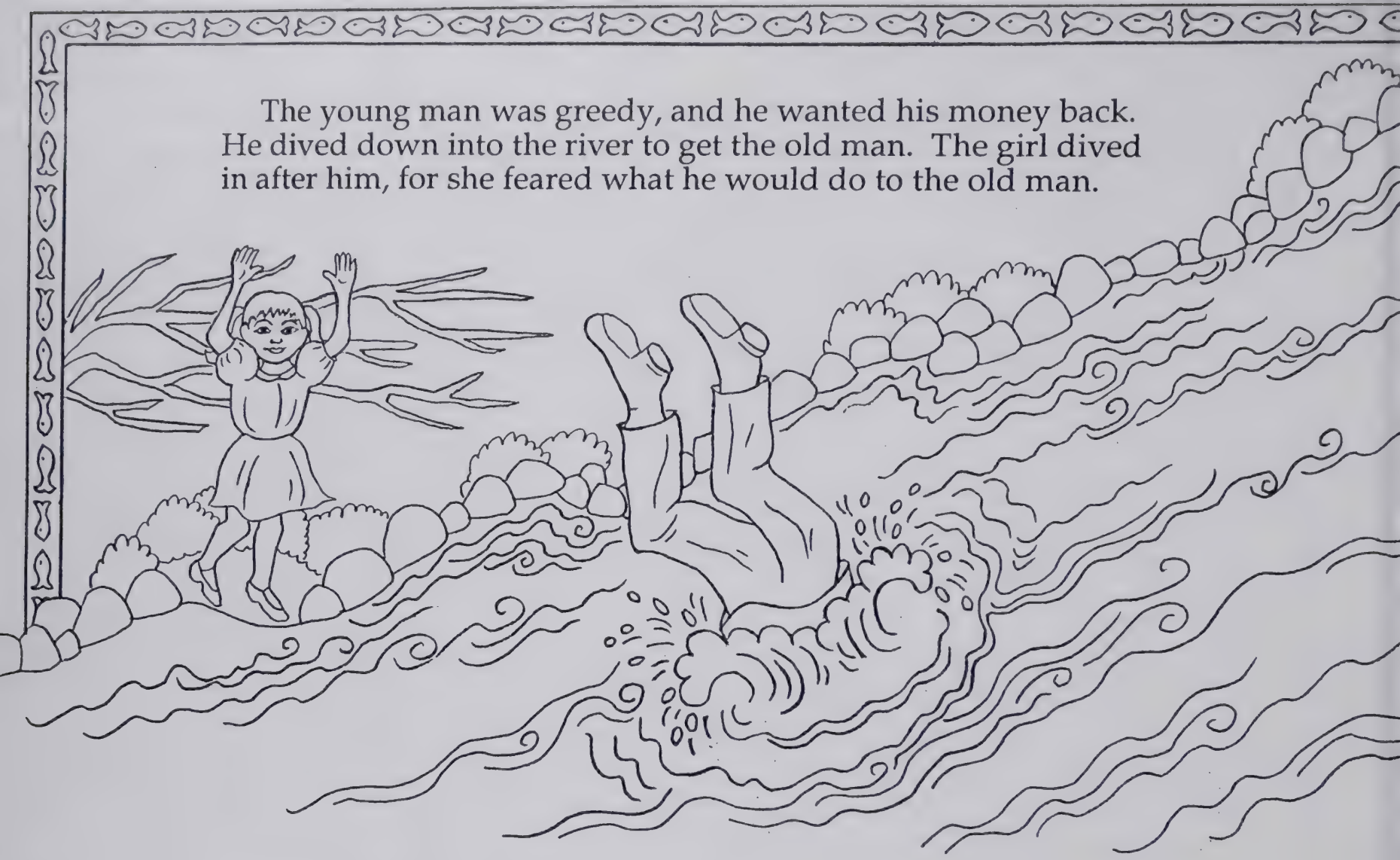
She laughed. "I would not take your money. I am searching for my shadow."



They talked, and agreed to spend the night in a tree by the river to find out who was playing tricks. The mother gave her daughter some extra food for the young man.

The youth fell asleep, but not the little girl. She watched. She saw a man with long flowing silver hair come running from the town to the river. He ran right into the river and disappeared. She woke the young man, who just caught a glimpse of the old man's hair floating down into the river.

The young man was greedy, and he wanted his money back. He dived down into the river to get the old man. The girl dived in after him, for she feared what he would do to the old man.



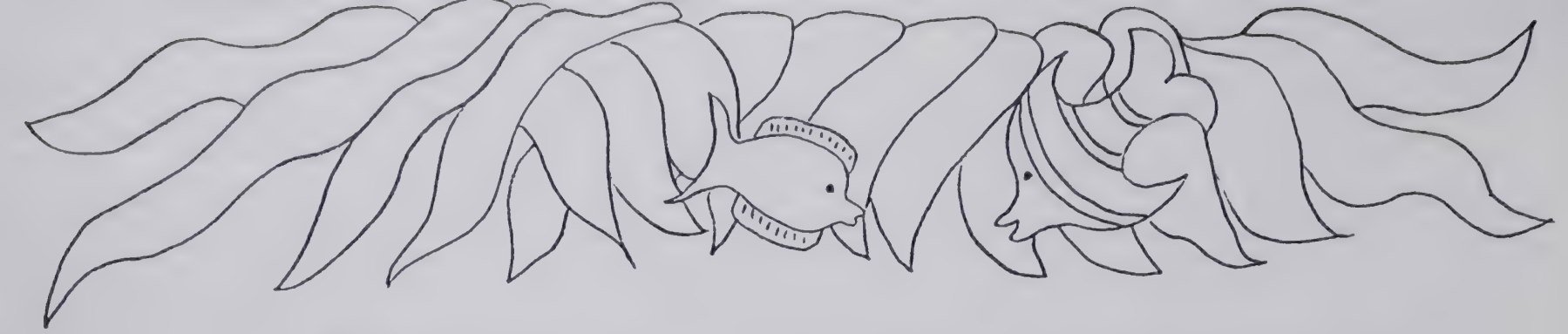
Down they swam to an underwater house. They peered through the window. There were black shapes in the house, and the little girl recognized her shadow. She pushed open the door, and the young man followed her. The door slammed behind her.

There stood the old man with the long flowing silver hair.

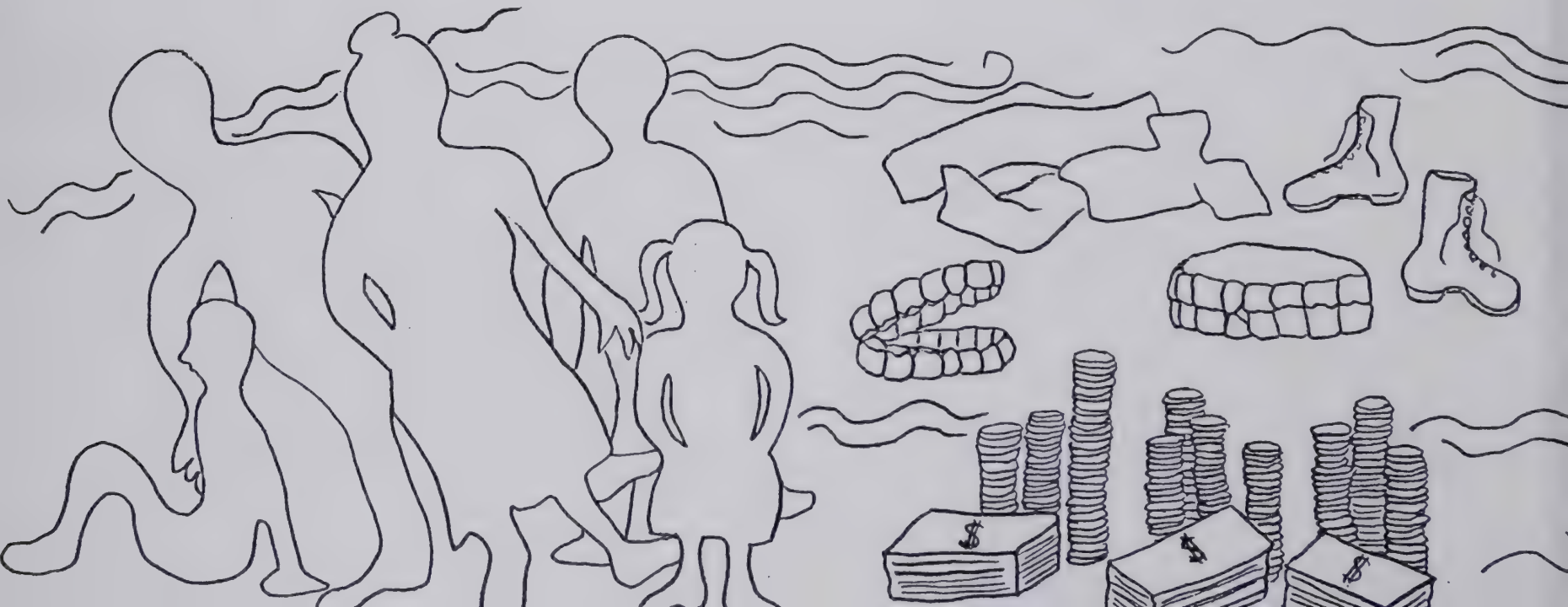
"What are you doing in my house?" the river man asked them with a big grin.

"We are looking for things that we lost. Who are you?"

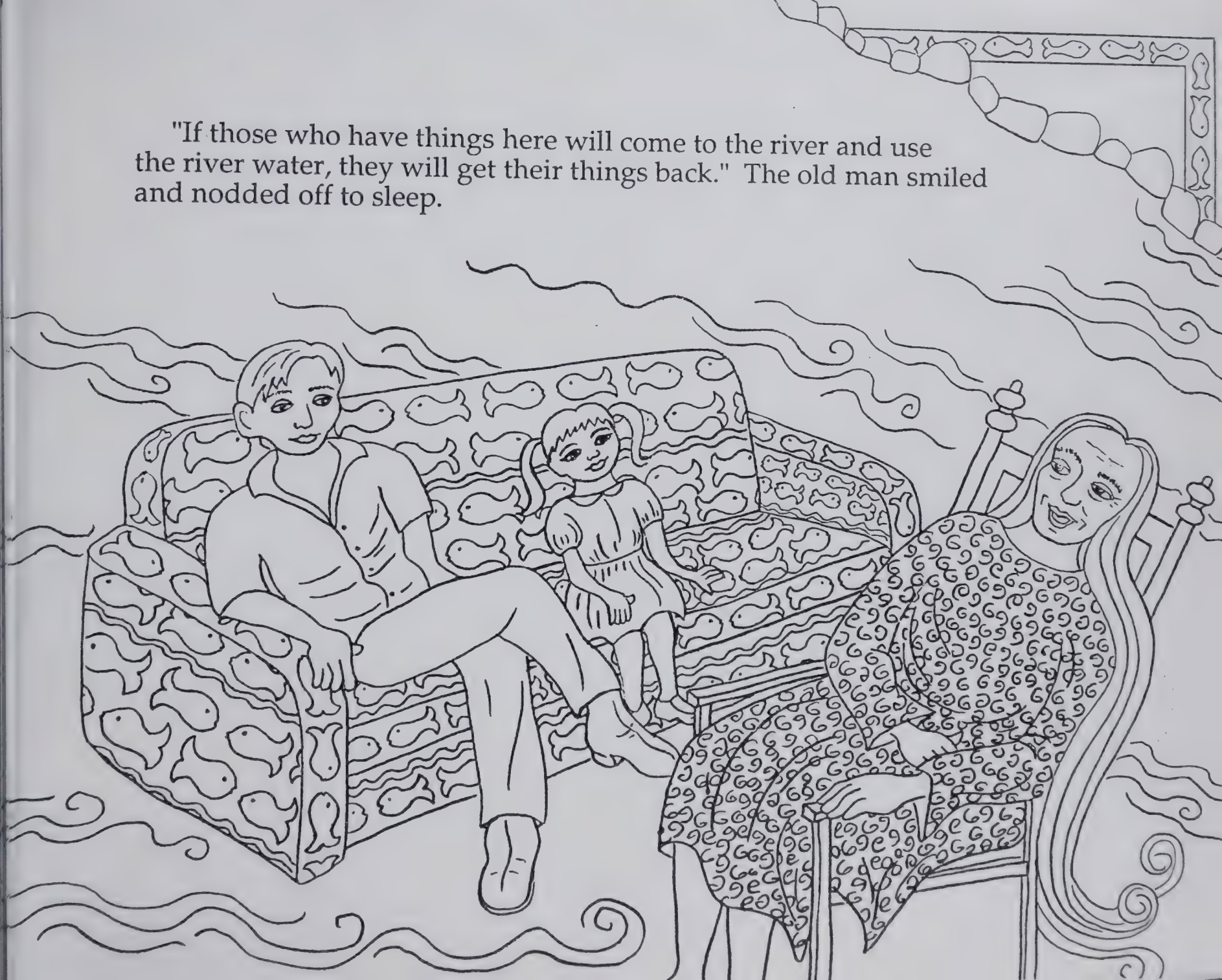
"I am the river man, I am the old who brings humor and joy into the lives of those that use my river water."



They listened to him. His wonderful, warm face glowed with a grand smile. They were happy to have found him and almost forgot about their things. When at last the river man said he was tired, for he had had a busy night, they took what they needed. The young man only took a little of his money, and the girl took her shadow.

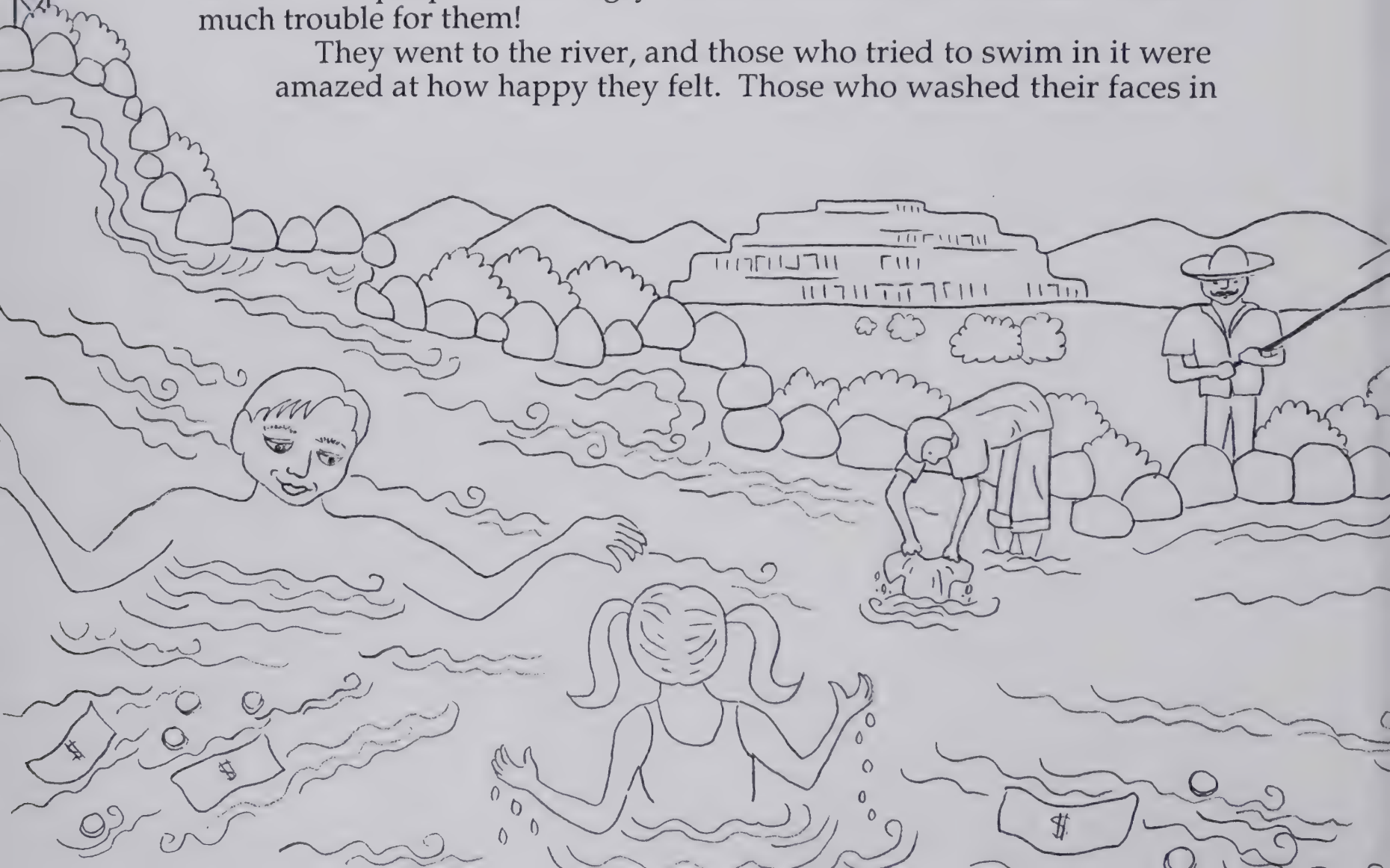


"If those who have things here will come to the river and use the river water, they will get their things back." The old man smiled and nodded off to sleep.

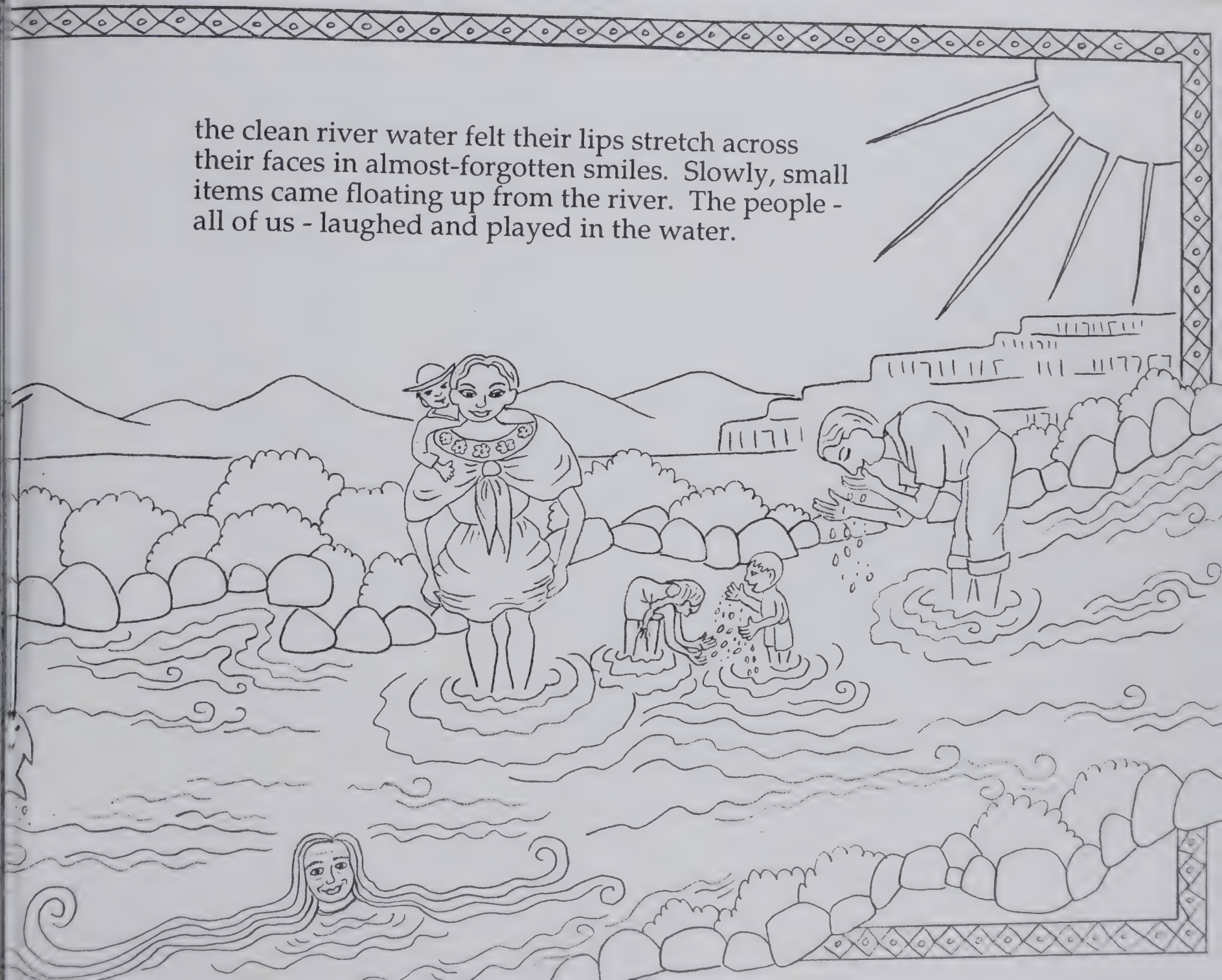


The next morning, the young man and the little girl went into town and told their story of the river man and his mischief and of the river water. The people were angry. How dared this river man make so much trouble for them!

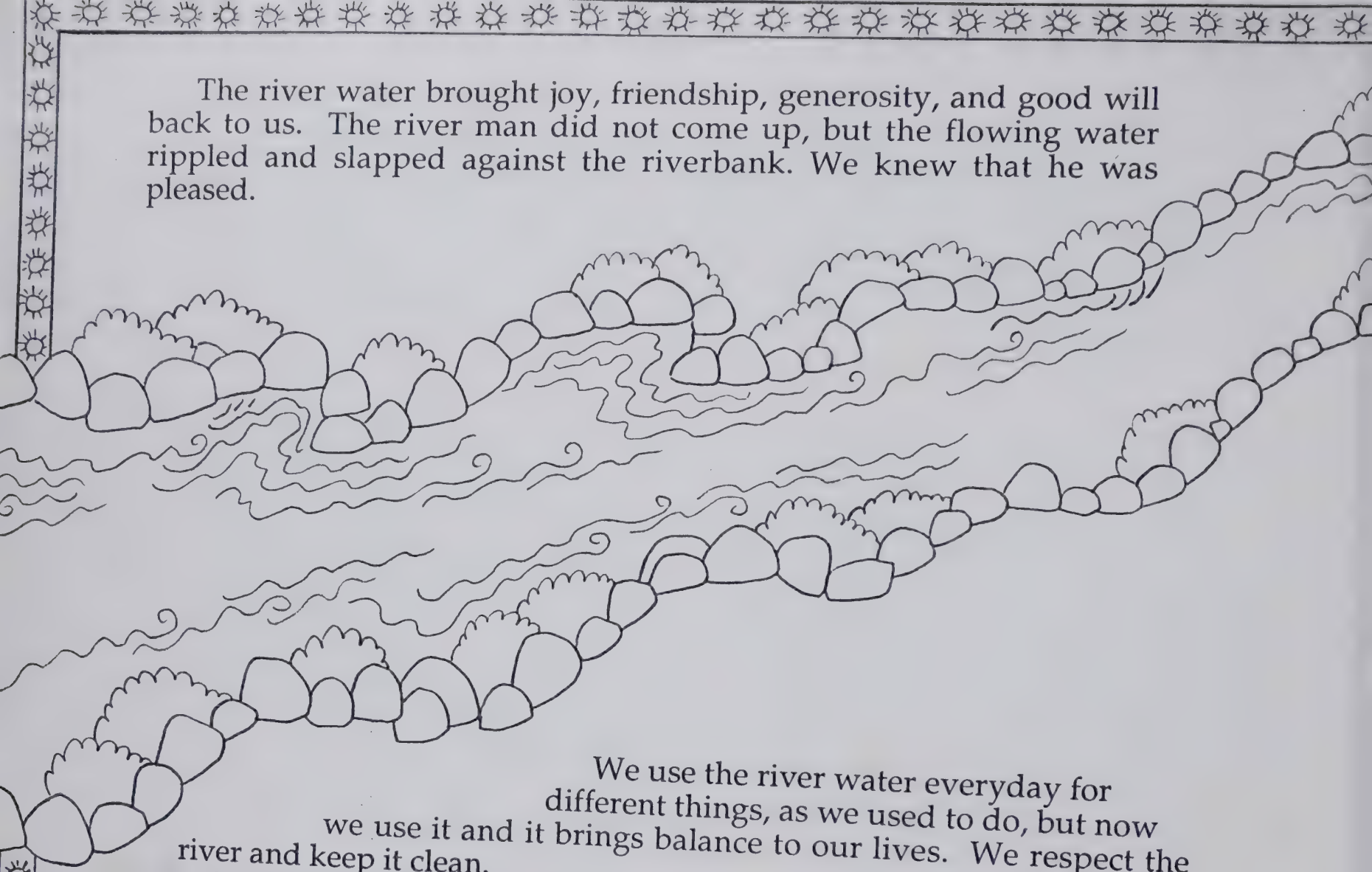
They went to the river, and those who tried to swim in it were amazed at how happy they felt. Those who washed their faces in



the clean river water felt their lips stretch across their faces in almost-forgotten smiles. Slowly, small items came floating up from the river. The people - all of us - laughed and played in the water.



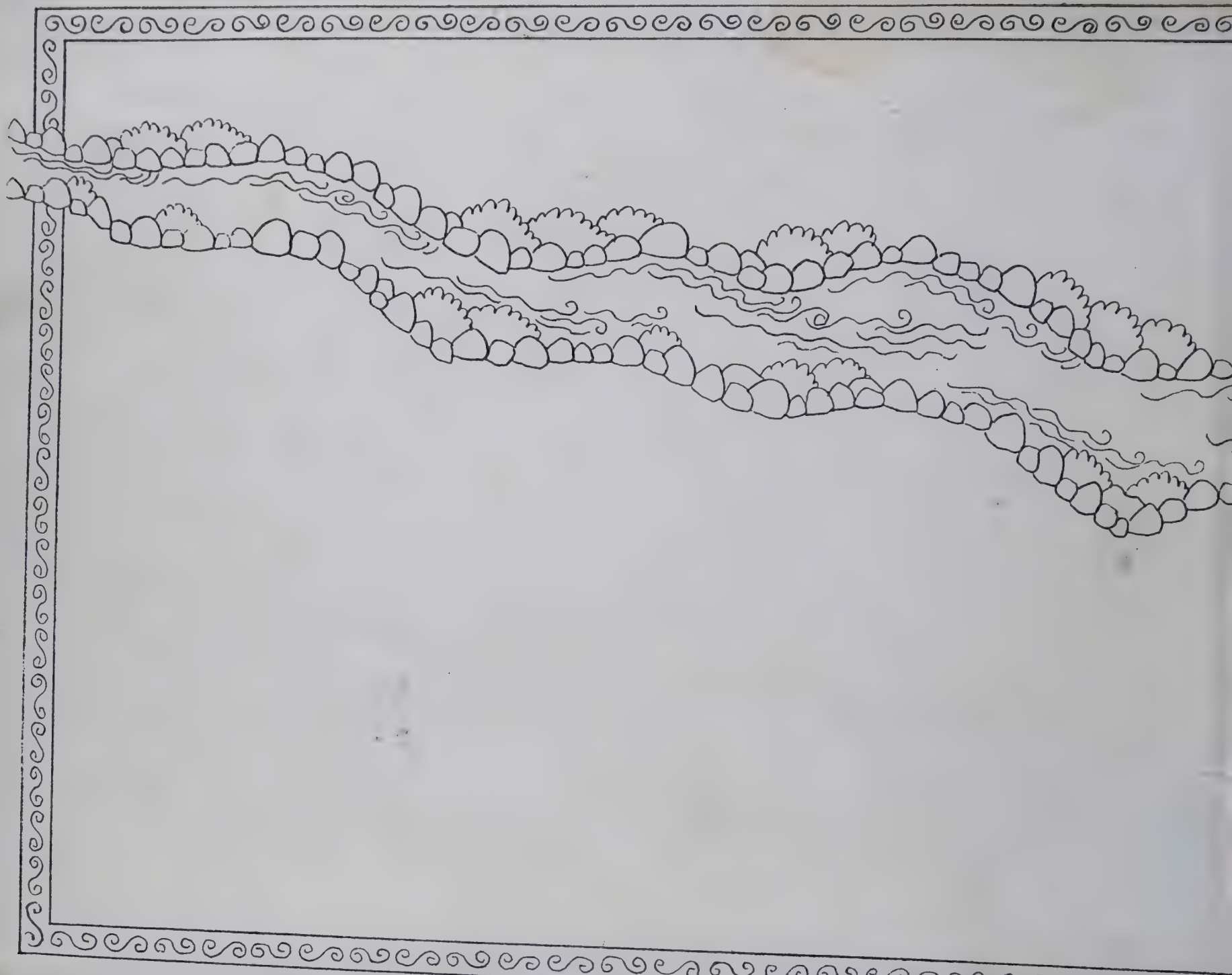
The river water brought joy, friendship, generosity, and good will back to us. The river man did not come up, but the flowing water rippled and slapped against the riverbank. We knew that he was pleased.



We use the river water everyday for different things, as we used to do, but now we use it and it brings balance to our lives. We respect the river and keep it clean.

In the reflection of the river water, we can see our own smiles. Look, and you can see yours, too.

The End



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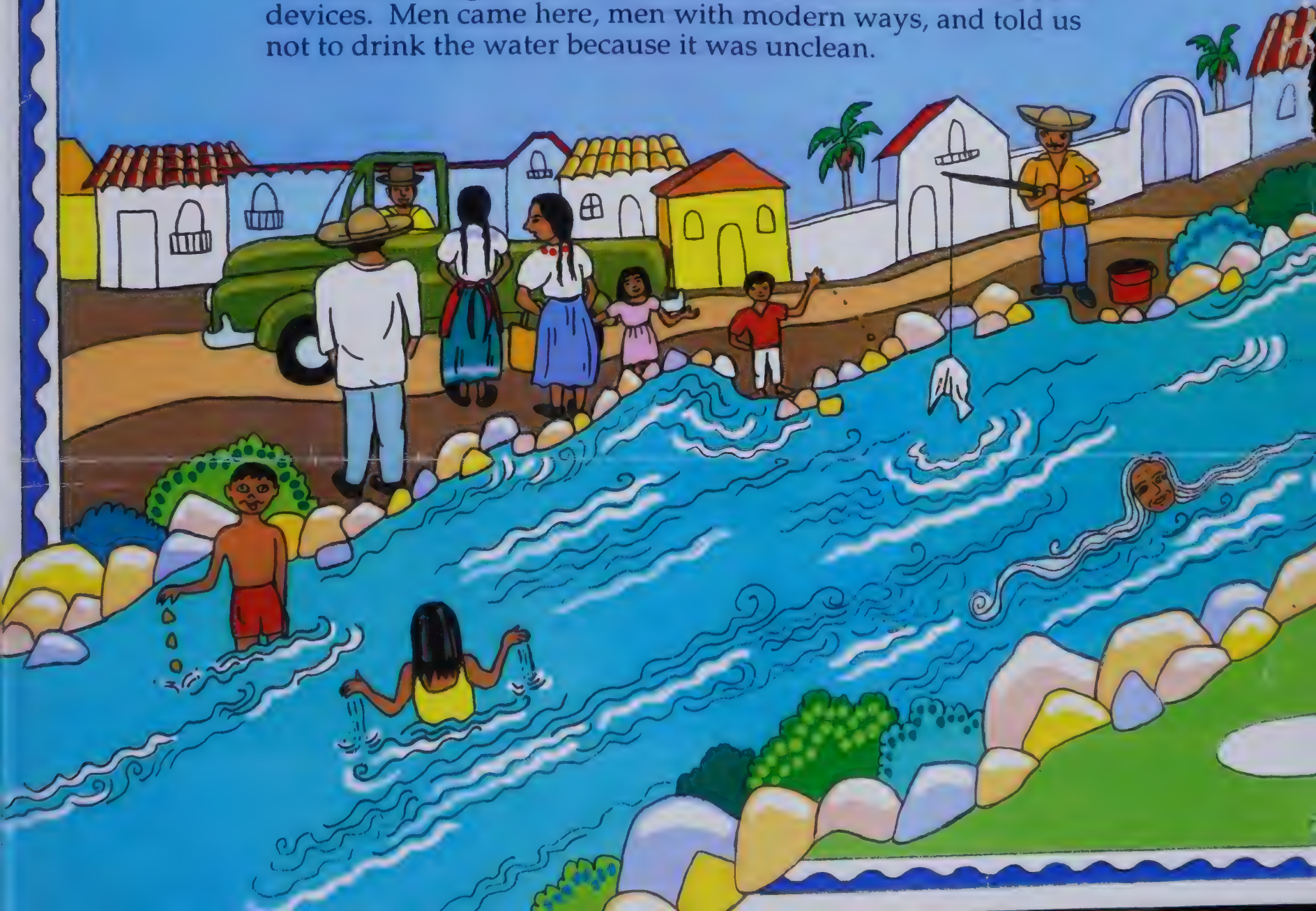

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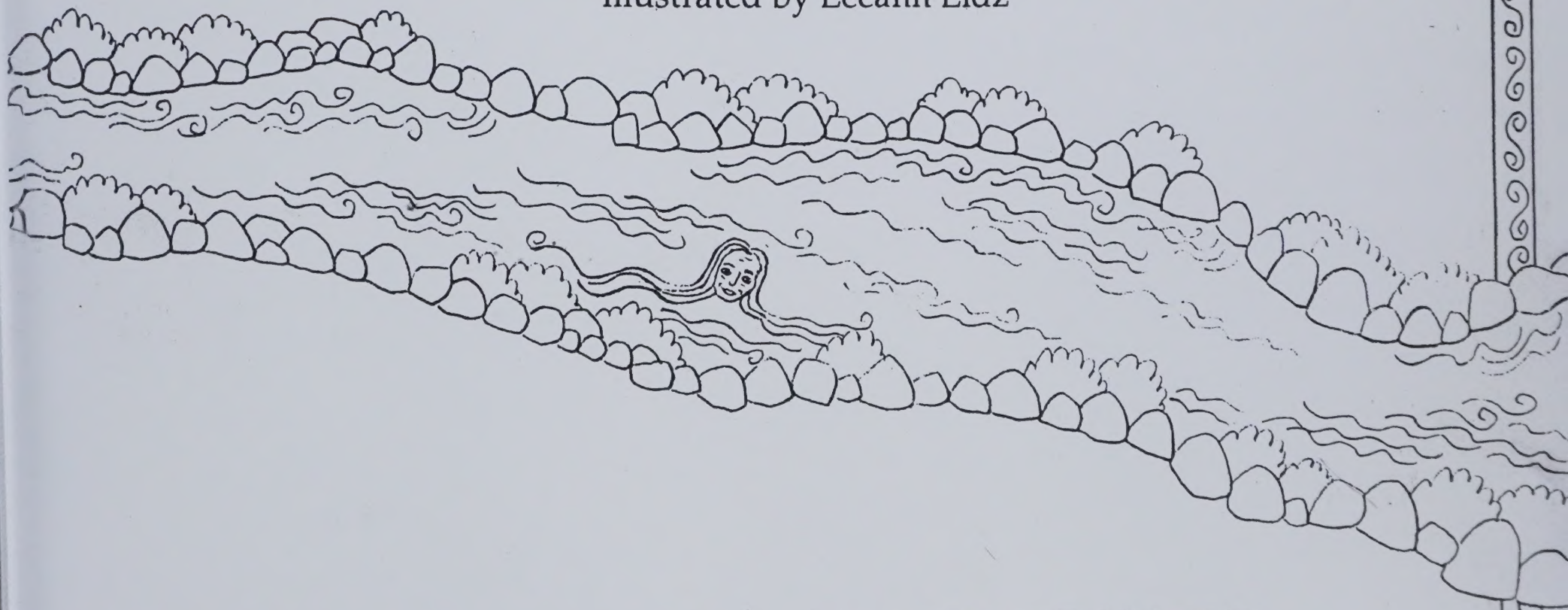

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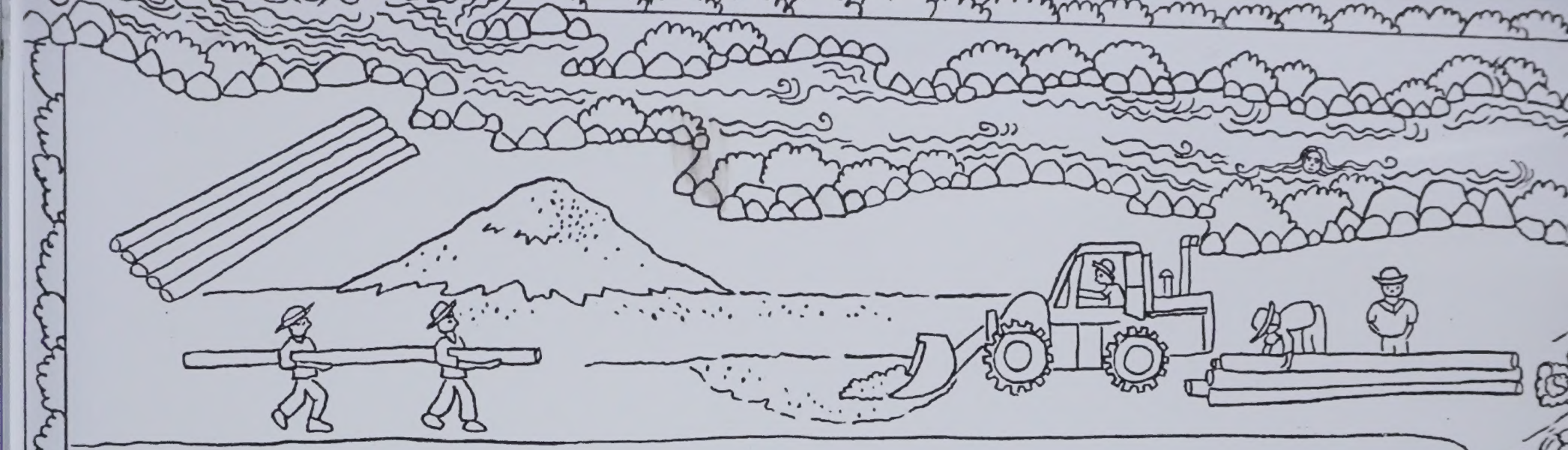

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